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Jacob Rader Marcus, Editor



THE THEOLOGY OF ISAAC MAYER WISE

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Andrew F. Key, Ph. D.

The J. Clarence Workum and Corale B.
Workum Fellow at the Hebrew Union College-
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THE THEOLOGY OF ISAAC MAYER WISE

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PREFACE

American Jewish history as a scientific discipline is very new, and gaps abound in its emergent monographic literature. It is to narrow those gaps that the American Jewish Archives has undertaken the monographic series -- "Monographs of the American Jewish Archives" -- to which the current work by Dr. Andrew F. Key is the fifth contribution.

Dr. Key's study of Isaac Mayer Wise's theological interests will be welcomed by scholars aware of Wise's place in the religious history of American Jewry -- and aware, also, of the lack of material on this subject. It is rather extraordinary that so little in the way of a systematic analysis of Wise's thought has appeared -- all the more extraordinary when one considers that Wise's activities have been virtually paradigmatic for succeeding generations. The entirety of American Jewish religious life has been significantly influenced by Wise's successful establishment of an Anglo-Jewish newspaper, a congregational union, a rabbinical organization, and a rabbinical seminary. "Imitation is the sincerest flattery," and even Wise's bitterest critics often did not fail to pattern their activities after his.

What, then, did he believe -- this man whose contributions to the development of the American Jewish religious scene were so seminal? Dr. Key has attempted to answer this question, and his effort constitutes yeoman service to the field of American Jewish historical research. Though limited to English-language sources and making no mention of Wise's prayerbook Minhag America (which has been superseded by the Union Prayer Book), the present work takes an impressive step in the direction of narrowing the gaps in our knowledge of Isaac Mayer Wise's intellectual and theological concerns.

The American Jewish Archives shares Dr. Key's hope that this study will "stimulate further efforts both in the study of Isaac M. Wise's thought and in the broader field of Jewish theology."

The Editors

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I wish to acknowledge my deep gratitude to Professor Jacob R. Marcus, Director of the American Jewish Archives, for his invaluable help in the preparation of this manuscript. It was at his suggestion that this work was undertaken, and under his guidance that it was written.

I also wish to thank Dr. Stanley F. Chyet and Miss Jeanette Weiss, both of the American Jewish Archives, for their cooperation and suggestions. They placed all the facilities of the Archives at my disposal and took many hours out of their busy schedules to help me untangle numerous perplexing problems.

The arduous task of proofreading fell upon Dr. Abraham I. Shinedling, who did his task admirably. Needless to say, any mistakes which may remain are entirely my responsibility.

Andrew F. Key



INTRODUCTION

Anyone at all acquainted with the subject under consideration in these pages will immediately recognize the presumption involved in offering an essay with the rather high-sounding title, "The Theology of Isaac Mayer Wise." Perhaps this is most clearly evident at the very outset, when an attempt is made to define the term "theology" itself. For the sake of clarity and brevity the present writer has avoided any detailed analysis of the many shades of "theological" thought, but has rather arbitrarily determined on the definition of the term into which he attempts to mold the present work.

For our purposes, then, let us define theology as "the systematic presentation of a religion's, or an individual's, conception of the Deity, of His relation to man, and of man's consequent hopes and actions which he grounds in this relationship." Or, as Isaac Mayer Wise himself would phrase it, "theology is the science of the conceptions of Deity in the human mind."¹

Unfortunately, it is only with considerable effort that such a definition can be made to include a man like Wise in the ranks of those who are called "theologians." For both Wise and the Judaism of his day were manifestly "nontheological," particularly if one lays a great deal of emphasis on the word "systematic."

¹American Israelite, XXXIII (New Series; Nov. 19, 1886), 4.

At this point a note on the rather obscure numbering of the volumes of The Israelite may be in order:

<u>Date</u>	<u>Volume Numbers</u>	<u>New Series Numbers</u>
1855-1874	I - XXII	
1874-1879	XXIII - XXXIII	I - XI
1880 (Year XXVI and Vol. No. LII)		
1881-1900		XXVII - XLVI

Explanation: The New Series numbers, corresponding to the change of the name from The Israelite to The American Israelite in 1874, which had run from I to XI by 1879, were scrapped in 1880. In that year, in order to compensate for earlier numbering by both the year and the half-year, the volume was called "Year XXVI" (the 26th year of publication) and "Volume LII" (the 52nd half-year of publication). Then, from 1881 on, the yearly volume numbering was retained.

With its emphasis upon "right actions" more than upon "right thinking" or "right doctrine," Judaism has always been an essentially nontheological religion. "Judaism refers to an enormous body of practices, embracing one's entire life, more than it refers to a body of doctrine."² Under such a religious system, it is not surprising that the greater part of systematic writing has been devoted to the definition of right action, and that the accompanying emphasis upon the individual Jew's doctrinal freedom of thought has tended to negate the type of dogmatic characteristic of Christianity.

Wise himself was rather suspicious of theology, for he measured it by the Christian manifestation which seemed to him oppressive and superstitious and which he spent most of his life combatting.

Justice must govern the nations, love must construe the law, virtue and righteousness must lead to satisfaction and happiness, and man's consciousness of God, immortality, and moral responsibility must be his catechism, his guiding star, his protecting angel in life and death. No dogmas; truth in the name of God!³

Not only Wise's suspicion of dogma tended to make him unsystematic; the very nature of his work tended to do so. Wise was first and foremost a hardheaded, practical, professional religionist. His main goal was union: union of all American Judaism; and all his writings were directed toward this purpose. Hence, his writings bear the stamp of being dashed off to solve immediate problems, here to plead for a college, there to refute some overly zealous Christian missionary, or elsewhere to castigate some Orthodox rabbi whom Wise considered to be "dragging his heels" in the face of progress.

Another problem which besets the systematic treatment of Wise's theology is that he was not particularly noted for his consistency. His solutions are often contrived and not especially feasible; he tended to use the Bible or the Talmud to prove what he thought needed proving at the time, and to ignore any contradictory material.⁴

²Nathan Glazer, American Judaism (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1957), p. 6.

³David Philipson and Louis Grossmann, Selected Writings of Isaac M. Wise (Cincinnati: Robert Clarke, 1900), p. 419.

⁴Cf. Israel Knox, Rabbi in America: The Story of Isaac M. Wise (Boston: Little Brown and Co., 1957), pp. 120-21. Cf. also Dena Wilansky, Sinai to Cincinnati (New York: Renaissance Book Co., 1937), pp. 237-49.

Then, too, the time in which he lived must be taken into account. As do countless writers, Wise was often capable of radical statements, while his actions were much nearer the mores of his day. Both his actions and his statements must be taken into consideration, if we are to arrive at any close approximation of his real belief. To cite a case in point, which, though quite trivial in itself, is rather revealing: in reviewing his past dealings as a newspaper editor, Wise made a very lofty ethical evaluation of his method of writing:

To discuss all questions in a purely objective and factual manner, as clearly and concisely as possible, and staying within the boundaries of the argument, without any mockery, sarcasm, bad jokes, scorn, or empty play on words.⁵

One could contrast this with his remarkably crude attack upon Isaac Leeser, the editor of The Occident.⁶

Before proceeding further, it may well be in order here to mention the sources from which this paper has been derived,⁷ for these, too, play their role in making any systemization of Wise's theology somewhat difficult. The greatest part of Wise's "theological" writings is found in the sermons, editorials, and essays which appeared in his newspaper, The Israelite. Indeed, almost all his major works appeared first in The Israelite in serial form and were only later abstracted to be published in book form. Even with the major works, then, we face a type of writing which is somewhat disconnected. Wise wrote as the mood or the very pragmatic need for "column inches" demanded. Because of this fact, any method of systemization utilized by the modern reviewer forces one of necessity into dealing with scattered thoughts and fragmentary ideas which have been largely taken out of context, reworked, and presented as an organized whole. Thus, the very process of organizing immediately involves one in change.

With all these reservations, the attempt at a reconstruction of the theology of Isaac Mayer Wise is well worth the effort, for his importance to American Jewish history--particularly that branch of American Jewry called "Reform"--is unquestioned. Much of Wise's theology is outdated, much of it has been superseded, and some of it was manifestly absurd when it was presented, but it is nevertheless worthy of consideration, if for no other reason than that "Wise said it."

⁵Isaac M. Wise, "The World of My Books," translated by Albert H. Friedlander, in American Jewish Archives, VI (June, 1954), 137.

⁶Cf. Israelite, IV (Sept. 4, 1857), 44.

⁷For a more detailed analysis, cf. the annotated bibliography at the end of this essay.

Providence, the all-Wise, most gracious and all-just.
This we believe and no more, and this agrees with the
results of science.⁹

Unfortunately, we are never told exactly how this agrees with the "results of science." From other statements, however, which Wise makes in dealing with the Christian Trinity, it would seem that he is using the word "agrees" here not so much to mean that science supported his own conclusions concerning the nature of God, but that science was showing the Trinitarianism of nineteenth-century orthodox Christianity to be illogical.

One other statement which Wise makes concerning the unity of the Deity should be considered here, for it takes the discussion out of the realm of abstract philosophical speculation and brings it to bear on the more pragmatic sphere of theology--where Wise was much more at home:

God is a unity, . . . wherefore all mankind will one day be united for one great end--to worship in truth the Most High, to adore His holy name with humility and purity. Then will also be fulfilled, . . . that God's name will be one.¹⁰

Thus it is seen that for Wise the main implication of the unity of the Deity is the unity of humanity in a common worship. It is quite probable that this is his main, if not his only, reason for consideration of this doctrine, since we must constantly hold it in mind that union, first of all Jewish congregations, and then of all humanity, was the chief object of Wise's ministry. More will be said concerning this assumption in the section dealing with Wise and Reform.

God Is Unchangeable

The second main attribute of God which we may abstract from Wise's writings is that God is unchangeable. This is of primary importance, for this doctrine lies at the very basis of the structure of his ethical system. If one holds to a more or less static ethic, the God in which the ethic is grounded must remain to the same extent more or less static. The modern school of "process theology"¹¹--which has its roots

⁹Israelite, V (May 13, 1859), 342.

¹⁰Philipson and Grossmann, op. cit., p. 47.

¹¹A theology which allows for an evolutionary change in the Deity.

at least as far back as Georg W. F. Hegel, and which received recognition through such philosophers as Alfred North Whitehead and John Dewey (and currently through Charles Hartshorne)--lies completely outside Wise's sphere of comprehension.

His position is, however, understandable, for any theology which relies heavily upon a revealed ethic must assume (or at least in Wise's day did assume) that it is an ethic given for all times and situations. Thus the revelation of God and the revelation of the ethic are combined in one static whole. As Israel Knox has stated:

Nor could Wise give his assent readily to what Parker called "the progressive idea of God"; one could not plausibly agree to this without diminishing the unique and definitive character of the Sinaitic revelation and without casting doubt upon the Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch. ¹²

Not only does an unchangeable God support an unchangeable ethic, but He also sustains an unchangeable universe:

If He would withdraw His care from the universe, it would exist no longer; but He was the same before the creation of the world and would remain the same if the universe vanish. ¹³

God Is Perfection

This attribute would almost be assumed in Wise's theology without further comment. Still, one notion of importance is to be noted here: that the perfection of God is not some abstract, philosophical necessity, but is, instead, something which is observable in the workings of the universe.

The observable manifestations of the Deity show that He is omnipotence, sovereign wisdom, supreme justice, and incomparable goodness. God reveals Himself as the ideal of perfection. ¹⁴

Indeed, Wise considers the perfection of the Deity as one of his "three fundamental principles" of the theology of Judaism, together with the assumption that God exists and that He reveals Himself. ¹⁵

¹²Knox, op. cit., p. 157.

¹³Israelite, III (Feb. 13, 1857), 252.

¹⁴Philipson and Grossmann, op. cit., p. 215.

¹⁵Ibid., p. 216.

God Is the Creator

Jehovah is an absolute and infinite being, and the cause of all finite beings and their modifications. He is the first cause, without which no effect is conceivable. The universe is the effect, depending forever on the divine cause for its existence. God is independent, the universe is not.¹⁶

Such a statement is quite typical of Wise's thought on this subject. While assuming the Creator God whom he finds in the biblical revelation, he feels that he must give the accompanying philosophical argument--invariably that of causality.¹⁷

Though Wise has little or nothing to say regarding the method of creation, and it is to be assumed that he would accept a fairly literal interpretation of Genesis 1,¹⁸ he does concern himself with the metaphysical relationship between the Creator and the created. The following statement about God is very interesting, if somewhat ambiguous:

He is the universe, and material nature is in Him; but He is not exhausted therein. The Cosmic God is not outside of the universe, nothing can be thought or imagined outside thereof, but He is outside of material nature as well as inside thereof; therefore we call Him the super-mundane God.¹⁹

Wise is evidently caught here on the two horns of the proverbial dilemma. Wishing, on the one hand, to maintain the relatedness of God to the universe, he thus speaks of Him as being both "outside" and "inside," but this throws him onto the other horn which assumes at least some type of pantheism, and this Wise refuses to do. Hence, he includes the statement, "He is not exhausted therein." The problem of how God is related to the world is, of course, not new with Wise. Wise's special problem is, however, that he seems to feel called upon to "locate" God, and he ends up with the thorny philosophical solution of placing Him within the universe. The next logical step is some shade of pantheism, but this is a step which he is not willing to take.

¹⁶Ibid., p. 214.

¹⁷Cf. Wise, The Essence of Judaism, p. 15.

¹⁸The question of evolution and the Bible will be discussed below under the heading "Wise and Evolution."

¹⁹Isaac M. Wise, The Cosmic God (Cincinnati: Office of The American Israelite, 1876), p. 171.

God Is Just

Wise is on much surer ground in speaking of God's justice than he is in the above-mentioned areas, for here he can remain completely within a biblical framework.

For Wise, God is a God of absolute justice.

The virtuous must be rewarded according to his virtues, and the wicked must be punished according to his wickedness; for God is the most just.²⁰

That this sweeping statement places many problems before him when it comes to discussing ethical motivation will be seen below, but for the present it suffices to notice the absolute nature of God's justice.

This is not, however, a punitive justice.

If man fails to perform his task... God will punish him, not, indeed, prompted by the ignoble passion of vengeance, but by the desire to remember man on remind man of his duty and prompt him to fulfill it.²¹

This is, then, absolute justice, but it is also justice tempered with mercy.

General Summaries of God's Attributes

Perhaps Wise's clearest statements concerning God are those in which he presents his thought in a systematic (or "sermonic") style. The following passage, which we quote at some length, is typical of Wise's method of dealing with this subject.

He is Almighty, for He is the force of all forces, the cause of all causes. He is omnipresent [sic], revealed everywhere by the ever-active force of all forces in nature, and every motion of the human intellect. He is omnipresent, for He fills all space and penetrates all atomic matter. He is all-wise and omniscient, for He is the intellect of all intellect, its cause and substance. He is the Preserver and Governor, for He is the will, freedom, and justice. He is the Cosmic God, who is

²⁰Israelite, II (March 7, 1856), 284.

²¹Ibid.

not anthropomorphous. He is not in heaven above nor on earth below, for He is everywhere, in all space, in all objects of nature, in every attribute of matter, and in every thought of the mind. "No man can see me and live." He appeared to none, because He continually and simultaneously appears to all and through all. He resides nowhere especially, because He is everywhere continually. He had no beginning, because He made it; and no end, because He has no beginning. He changes not, because all changes are effects, and He is the cause of all causes and no effect. He is the Cosmic God, --the only God, --whose name is ineffable, who alone is, was, and will be forever and aye, whose existence none can deny, and whose immensity none can comprehend. We know, we feel His immeasurable grandeur, and worship Him with awe.²²

This may not have been a God to capture the mind of the philosopher, but it was more than enough for the eye of faith.²³

God Is Unknowable

In the final analysis, however, Wise's God is a God who cannot be known through philosophical or theological reasoning. Or, as Wise puts it:

We know that God is, and know in part from nature, history and revelation what He does and what He desires man to do; but we know not what and how He is.²⁴

In making such a statement, Wise slams the door shut in the face of theological speculation. But let us not judge him too harshly. He is but one step removed from the rigid conservatism of Orthodoxy. This is evident in the following:

All speculations on the essence of Deity, theological or metaphysical, dualistic, trinitarian or polytheistic,

²²Wise, The Cosmic God, p. 163.

²³For more examples of such summaries, cf. Wise, The Essence of Judaism, pp. 16-18; and Yearbook of the Central Conference of American Rabbis (Cincinnati: Bloch Publishing and Printing Co., 1891), I, 17.

²⁴Wise, Judaism and Christianity, Their Agreements and Disagreements (Cincinnati: Bloch and Co., 1883), p. 88.

spiritualistic or materialistic, are not only as absurd as is atheism itself, but they are also blasphemy.²⁵

Thus, while a few statements may be permitted about the nature of God (and, in the case of His "unity," are necessary), His "essence" is not an open area for investigation. Fortunately, the perusal of such areas as God's revelation and the nature of man bears no such stigma.

God Reveals Himself in History

Wise stood squarely in the framework of "revealed theology" by pointing out that God reveals Himself in three ways: in nature, in history, and in the Bible.

Judaism... maintains that God is no less revealed in nature and history than in the Bible, and His operations must be observed and His perfections studied in all departments of revelation.²⁶

Of revelation in nature, Wise has actually very little to say. It is assumed that he thinks of the order of the universe and of the harmony of the natural laws, for this would harmonize well with his statements about arguing back to a "first cause."

Wise felt that the revelation (providence) of God is easily discernible in history, and, for Wise, this providence takes on both positive and negative aspects.

Negatively, Wise argues that God causes nations to fall when their goals do not measure up to His standards. Wise takes this quite literally and cites the specific example of Spain, which he sees as going into a period of decline primarily because of that country's treatment of its Jewish population.²⁷

In a more positive vein, God reveals Himself by assisting the "progress of civilization."²⁸ This, too, is a quite literal dogma for Wise, and, perhaps because he really despairs of man's own efforts to

²⁵Philipson and Grossmann, op. cit., p. 214.

²⁶Israelite, IV (Aug. 14, 1857), 44.

²⁷Ibid., III (Aug. 22, 1856), 52-53.

²⁸Ibid., IV (Dec. 4, 1857), 172.

progress (as the following passage suggests), he feels that God will act whether man wills progress or not.

A more powerful and more intelligible revelation of God than in the history of mankind exists not even in nature's extensive province. There is design, wisdom, goodness, foresight and execution in every one of its chapters. However wicked or selfish the prominent actors of a historical period may have been, an unseen hand always turned the wheel of events to the blessing of mankind, entirely contrary to the will, intention, and expectation of the human factors. This fact is so eloquent that it needs no commentary, and a fact it is.²⁹

Wise does state in another place that "...the path of life, upward to life... must be earnestly willed in order to be gained."³⁰ The general tenor of his thought seems, nonetheless, to be directed toward revelation (providence) by God, whether or not man does anything about it. At least in the historical realm, Wise is a fatalist.

Though revelation in history does not cease,³¹ it is not a "progressive" revelation--not at least in the sense that it might change its content.

As a general rule let us understand that revelation, like creation, like the work of genius, bursts into existence suddenly and completely. Evolution can only succeed it, development and practical application can only follow it.³²

Thus it works itself out that biblical revelation is actually revelation in full (Wise is thus aligning himself with Orthodoxy), and that all later apparent manifestations of God are only the logical, practical application of that primary revelation.³³ Interestingly, however, he seems to take this position not only out of deference to his Orthodox background, but also out of his very static concept of the nature of truth itself.

²⁹Ibid., VII (April 26, 1861), 340.

³⁰American Israelite, XXVII (New Series V; Oct. 13, 1876), 4.

³¹Israelite, XXI (Dec. 26, 1873), 4.

³²Wise, Judaism and Christianity, pp. 33-34.

³³Let it be noted in passing that this is consistent with Wise's negation of the idea of a "progressing God" (cf. above).

All truth is God's. Man has no power, no control over it. He can neither destroy nor even change it.... Whatever is true now, or was true in the past, will be eternally true. Truth is infinite. It is not limited by either space or time.³⁴

The Goal of History

As has been hinted above, the goal of history is progress, which would be absolute in the perfection of mankind.

Thoroughly convinced as I am of the final triumph of truth over all shades and descriptions of fiction and errors, of the final salvation of all mankind by this triumph; thoroughly convinced as I am that philosophy, science, and art, that the living word of zealous men must bring about the final triumph of truth, the salvation and happiness of mankind, I never feel tired or exhausted....³⁵

Wise firmly believed that this progress of history could be seen and recorded, particularly in his own century.

With all our imperfections upon our heads, the nineteenth century is more humane, and intelligent, than any preceding one. We progress, hence, we must reach human perfection in the organism of society, and in the conscience of the individual.³⁶

Yet, it must be pointed out that Wise was not entirely consistent at this point. He describes civilization in terms suggesting a linear upward progression from ancient days, through the partially fulfilled present, to the golden future. On the other hand, however:

It is humiliating, nevertheless it is true, that ancient society produced greater and better men than the modern phases of civilization have to show.³⁷

³⁴Israelite, XXI (Dec. 19, 1873), 4.

³⁵Ibid., X (Jan. 1, 1864), 212.

³⁶Ibid., XVII (Aug. 19, 1870), 8.

³⁷American Israelite, XXIX (July 21, 1882), 21.

And:

If it is admitted that in the arts we are in advance of the ancients, and that in the subjective sciences they were our superiors, it must be equally admitted that they were grander characters, men and women of a more sublime and a finer type.³⁸

Why is this contradiction permitted by Wise? Probably because, while he cannot let go of the idea of progress, he wishes to maintain the intellectual and moral sanctity with which he surrounds the ancient Hebrews, and, more particularly, Moses.³⁹

Revelation in the Bible

While Wise witnesses to revelation in nature and history, he turns to the Bible for his chief source. As Israel Knox states, "the Sinaitic revelation was a postulate, an axiomatic and self-evident truth."⁴⁰ And the biblical revelation, because it is absolute truth, can, by definition, never be surpassed.

It is not true that progressive humanity discovered new truths in religion and ethics, which are not contained in the Bible; man only saw these verities faster and clearer as he progressed in wisdom and enlightenment; but it was told us from the beginning fully and completely. There is no moral truth which is not contained in Sacred Scriptures.⁴¹

Or, as he states in another place, "We know of God, His divine essence and nature, precisely what Moses told us and no more...."⁴²

³⁸Philipson and Grossmann, op. cit., p. 155.

³⁹Cf. American Israelite, XXV (New Series III; Nov. 12, 1875), 4; and Israelite, XXI (Sept. 5, 1873), 4.

⁴⁰Knox, op. cit., p. 122.

⁴¹Israelite, XIII (Aug. 31, 1866), 5.

⁴²Ibid., VII (Sept. 14, 1860), p. 90; cf. also Philipson and Grossmann, op. cit., p. 210; and Wise, A Defense of Judaism Versus Proselytizing Christianity (Cincinnati: American Israelite, 1889), p. 49.

Taking this stand upon the importance of the biblical revelation through Moses, Wise of necessity must offer evidence that the event at Sinai actually happened. He does this by adducing three "proofs": 1) A whole nation saw it happen; 2) This nation continued to, and still does, testify to it as a fact; and 3) Christianity and Islam are built upon it.⁴³ This Wise calls "solid historical evidence," or an "argumentum a consensu gentium," which, for Wise, is the same thing.⁴⁴

One should not assume, however, that Wise elevates the whole of the Bible to the rank of perpetual and absolute truth. He was a literalist, but not the type which seeks to retain every letter of the Bible as divine command.

The great mistake of many ancient as well as modern expounders of the Law is, that they accept the whole body of the Pentateuch as one mass of divine ordinances, all of them equally holy and unalterable.⁴⁵

Wise's general assumption, in attempting to describe which portions of the Bible are still valid and binding, was that "the principles alone were permanent, never to be discarded, whereas the embodiments might vary in accordance with the requirements and the spirit of the times."⁴⁶ This worked itself out in a differentiation between those laws which were purely local (that is, to Palestine) and those which embodied true "principles."

Although all the laws of the Pentateuch concerning a particular locality are actually abrogated, still the principles contained therein are true and obligatory.⁴⁷

This method yielded to biblical material a "hierarchy" of religious values which provided the following descending scale:

- 1) Of most importance is the Decalogue.
- 2) Next in importance is the rest of the Pentateuch which makes specific the doctrines of the Decalogue.

⁴³Wise, Judaism and Christianity, pp. 25-27.

⁴⁴Ibid.

⁴⁵Israelite, XVI (Nov. 12, 1869), 8.

⁴⁶Knox, op. cit., p. 123.

⁴⁷Israelite, VI (June 15, 1860), 396; cf. also III (Nov. 21, 1856), 157; and Philipson and Grossmann, op. cit., p. 125.

- 3) In last place come those laws which have a specifically temporary character.⁴⁸

The prophets and hagiographists are of next importance after the Torah. Lastly--and, indeed, to be judged as to value entirely by reason--come all post-biblical expositions (including the Talmud).⁴⁹

Wise and Modern Biblical Criticism

It almost goes without saying that Wise would react unfavorably to the critical biblical scholarship which in his day was beginning to gain real momentum.

At first he hailed critical scholarship, for he saw in it an ally in his polemic against the New Testament.⁵⁰ However, his enthusiasm cooled rapidly when he saw that the critical method could be applied to more than one source:

Ever since [David Friedrich] Strauss and [Ernest] Renan have run the dissector's knife into the body of the New Testament, other parties have adopted the decision of Solomon, to cut in twain both the dead and the living child, and they run the dissector's knife also into the body of the Old Testament.⁵¹

Not only did Wise fear the outcome of such investigations, but he objected to them also for more sectarian reasons.

The strangest perversion in modern Bible criticism is, that while in former centuries Christians eagerly learned of Jewish expounders of Scriptures and searched the Hebrew sources for information and enlightenment--young Israel now seeks information exclusively of non-Jewish critics, and in all their researches refer to no Jewish authority.... This would be sufficient reason for us to reject any theory;

⁴⁸Cf. Philipson and Grossmann, op. cit., pp. 133 ff.

⁴⁹Ibid., p. 208.

⁵⁰Israelite, III (Oct. 10, 1856), 108.

⁵¹American Israelite, XXVI (New Series LII; Jan. 9, 1880), 4. For a very pertinent comment regarding Wise's position, cf. Samuel Sandmel, "Isaac Mayer Wise's 'Jesus Himself,'" in Essays in American Jewish History (Cincinnati: American Jewish Archives, 1958), p. 326.

for Protestant Europe, or rather Germany, runs religion to its end, viz., to atheism. Since when do the Protestant theologians understand the Bible better than the Jewish expounders?⁵²

In one respect, however, Wise was quite right: if he allowed the critics to undermine the historicity of the event at Sinai, his whole theological system would likewise be endangered.

The science commonly called Modern Biblical Criticism, actually Negative Criticism, which maintains, on the strength of unscientific methods, that the Pentateuch is not composed of original Mosaic material, no Psalms are Davidian, no Proverbs Solomonic, the historical books are unhistorical, the prophecies were written post festum [factum?], there was no revelation, inspiration or prophecy, must also maintain that the Bible is a compendium of pious or even impious frauds, willful deceptions, unscrupulous misrepresentations; whence comes the Bible truth of which they speak?⁵³

Of these objections, Wise has the most to say regarding the Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch. Indeed, this point seems to have been a very dear one to him, for he stresses it out of all proportion to its importance for his theology.⁵⁴ Apparently he failed to consider the possibility that divine authorship could be maintained without Moses' having been the compiler of the whole work.

⁵²American Israelite, XXVII (New Series; Feb. 4, 1881), 252.

⁵³Wise, Pronaos to Holy Writ (Cincinnati: Robert Clarke, 1891), p. 4; cf. also American Israelite, XXXI (New Series; March 13, 1885), 4; XXXIV (New Series; Jan. 27, 1888), 4; XXX (New Series; Sept. 21, 1883), 4; and Glazer, op. cit., p. 29.

⁵⁴While a detailed analysis of this topic would carry us too far astray from our central concern, the reader is referred to The Israelite, III (Nov. 21, 1856), 162; American Israelite, XXVII (New Series; Oct. 22, 1880), 132; Knox, op. cit., pp. 119, 122; Philipson and Grossmann; op. cit., pp. 156-57; and Wise, History of the Israelitish Nation, from Abraham to the Present Time (Albany: J. Munsell, 1854), pp. 193-94.

Revelation and Reason

Wise based his belief squarely on the notion of revealed religion. This is not to say, however, that revelation in any sense negated the rational aspect of his theology, for, as he said, "whatever is unreasonable is irreligious; and whatever is irreligious is revolting to reason."⁵⁵

Reason is not the primary element in theology, for the material of belief is, after all, given in revelation. Nevertheless, reason must be brought to bear upon this material. Judaism is, by Wise's definition, "the fear of the Lord and the love of man in harmony with the dicta of reason."⁵⁶

Indeed, in his attempt to prove that the revelation at Sinai was completely rational (and hence acceptable to all men), he at times almost equates the Sinaitic revelation and the proper use of reason.

We are satisfied that the Mosaic dispensation and the proper religion of sound reason are perfectly identical.⁵⁷

He takes this stand for the substantiation of (or as an outgrowth of?) his belief in the universal mission of Israel (see below). It must here be noted, however, that in equating revelation and reason, he is ultimately negating the need for revelation in his theology. It is extremely difficult to decide whether Wise ever actually considered this possibility or not. If so, he confirmed his belief in the need for revelation by his silence on the matter.

In his attempts to maintain the Bible as a rational book, Wise makes some rather absurd statements. The food laws are, for example, primarily health measures. At one period in his life, at least, Wise seriously considered the possibility that Moses was the discoverer of the fact that trichinosis was caused by the eating of pork.⁵⁸

⁵⁵Israelite, XIV (May 8, 1868), 4.

⁵⁶Knox, op. cit., p. 129; cf. also Philipson and Grossmann, op. cit., p. 198.

⁵⁷Israelite, III (March 20, 1857), 292; cf. also VII (Sept. 14, 1860), 90.

⁵⁸Ibid.; cf. XII (Feb. 23, 1866), 269; and American Israelite, XXV (New Series III; Oct. 8, 1875), 4.

Theologically more to the point is his handling of the problem of miracles. In brief, his position was that

no miracles are necessary to support the religious and moral truths of the Bible; hence miracles may be expounded in any way or shape, it affects not in the least the truth of the Scriptures.⁵⁹

Miracles are to be ignored because: 1) they do not affect the truth of the Bible; 2) Judaism bases no doctrines on them;⁶⁰ and 3) they are not rational.

One feels, however, that Wise was much more concerned with the problem than his writings, at least on the surface, admit. For, were he to negate all such elements in the Bible, he would be bringing into severe question the Bible's divine authorship. He cannot have, on the one hand, a completely rational Bible unless he ignores the miracles, but, on the other hand, he cannot simply expunge the miracles, if he maintains the sanctity of the Bible which "divine authorship" gives to it.

His answer to the problem is to make the miracles a concession to superstitious people.

... the Bible must be understood in truth [sic] and perfect harmony with the results of modern science. It is a libel on the words of God to maintain for a moment [that] God's words are contradictory to the results of modern science... the Bible teaches moral and religious truths only; in physical matters the authors accommodated their words to the conceptions of the people....⁶¹

This is at best a weak solution.

With this emphasis upon reason, it was imperative that Wise should say something concerning the criterion by which rational truth

⁵⁹Israelite, V (Oct. 29, 1858), 132.

⁶⁰Cf. Wise, A Defense of Judaism Versus Proselytizing Christianity, p. 23.

⁶¹Israelite, V (Oct. 29, 1858), 132.

may be obtained. He makes two general observations concerning this matter. First of all, he postulates in the mind of man certain "innate ideas,"⁶² which are the

postulates of all theology and theologies, and they are axiomatic. They require no proof, for all men always knew what is self-evident; and no proof can be adduced to them, for they are transcendent.⁶³

This material is "intuitive knowledge," and man discovers it "in himself."⁶⁴

His second observation is that "Whatever all men of all times knew must be a fact, and facts stand in no need of logical demonstration."⁶⁵ This "counting of noses" method of approach does not, of course, take into account the possibility that men may be deluded, as he later would admit in connection with his discussion of morality (see below). Still, this is a logical conclusion if one adheres to the principle that men are generally rational animals and that "deluded beings" are merely an exception to the rule (see below in the same connection).

In concluding this section, we should note that, in the last analysis, Wise was convinced that both revelation and reason must be taken as guides for life. He saw in them no essential conflict, or, if he did, he felt that he could pass over such conflict in silence.⁶⁶

⁶²1) That there is a God; 2) That both God and man wish intercommunication; 3) That the good and the right are desirable; and 4) That there are future rewards and punishments. Cf. Wise, "An Introduction to the Theology of Judaism," in Judaism at the World's Parliament of Religions (Cincinnati: Robert Clarke, 1894), pp. 1-25; cf. also Israelite, IX (Oct. 31, 1862), 132; III (Jan. 30, 1857), 236; and Philipson and Grossmann, op. cit., p. 228.

⁶³Judaism at the World's Parliament of Religions, p. 5.

⁶⁴Philipson and Grossmann, op. cit., p. 198.

⁶⁵Israelite, XIV (May 8, 1868), 4; cf. also IX (Oct. 24, 1862), 124.

⁶⁶Philipson and Grossmann, op. cit., pp. 151-52.

Wise and Evolution

The most hotly discussed theological problem in the area of revelation and reason was, in Wise's time, that of evolution. Wise had no objections to the principle of evolution as such. He could even make the following statement:

Man, it appears, is not the highest, although the last link in the chain of beings. Creatures of infinitely higher natures, in matter and mind perfected, must succeed him, as he succeeded the flora and fauna of all past ages.⁶⁷

This much he had to concede to the science of his day as being a reasonable deduction.

When, however, it came to the more precise description of evolutionary development, chiefly that of Charles Darwin, Wise refused to give an inch, for he felt that if he did so, the biblical basis of his theology would crumble.

Nobody will ever succeed in discovering the man of Scriptures or of history in Darwin's hypothetical man. There does not exist the mere possibility of harmonizing Darwin's Descent of Man with the Bible, or with the philosophy of all centuries — i. e., with the intelligence and self-consciousness of man.⁶⁸

Wise lists three main objections to Darwinism aside from this major point of consideration: 1) Natural selection seems to deny the biblical account of origin from a single human pair;⁶⁹ 2) he literally feels repulsion at the idea that primal man was, as he phrases it, "a monkey or baboon";⁷⁰ and 3) "survival of the fittest" is basically, to Wise, an immoral doctrine, because it assumes that "might makes right."⁷¹

⁶⁷American Israelite, XXVI (New Series LII; Jan. 30, 1880), 4; cf. also XXVII (New Series V; Oct. 13, 1876), 4.

⁶⁸Ibid., XXIII (New Series I; July 31, 1874), 5.

⁶⁹Ibid.; cf. XLV (New Series; Oct. 27, 1898), 4.

⁷⁰Israelite, VIII (Aug. 9, 1861), 44.

⁷¹Wise, The Cosmic God, p. 51.

An interesting fact to note is that Wise links Darwin's theories to "Christian Pessimism."

It took a Christian savant, one that grew up under the pessimistic and degrading estimate of human nature, to hit upon the idea of man's descendency from a brute; in none else could the ideal of manhood become so debased.⁷²

⁷²Wise, A Defense of Judaism Versus Proselytizing Christianity, p. 40.

SECTION II: MAN

The Nature of Man

Man is created in the image of God and is gifted with the "God-like capacities" of "free will, understanding, consciousness of duty, and hope of immortality."⁷³ The "imago Dei" is not, however, something with which man is endowed by the mere fact of birth; it is something potential which must be nurtured.

Man's happiness and the perfection of his nature depend on the purity of his motives and the righteousness of his doings. Like God, man must learn to love the true, the good and the beautiful for their own sake, and to abhor falsehood, wickedness and impurity as being abominable in themselves. Thus man becomes godlike.⁷⁴

Man consists essentially of body (an "animal organism") and soul ("the principle that thinks and wills, vivifies and governs the body").⁷⁵ This dualism has its roots in the twofold basis of Wise's theology: traditional Judaism and biblical religion, with their emphasis upon the importance of the physical (particularly in regard to the legal-ethical), and the rational, with its elevation of the world of thought somewhat above the physical. For Wise, "spiritual" seems, in the last analysis, to be identical with "rational." This dualism is very important theologically, for only within this framework can Wise's ethics and eschatology be understood. This will be developed in more detail in the proper place.

Man, contrary to Wise's admission of the truth of evolution, is the "ultimate aim of existence."⁷⁶ It is not surprising, therefore, that man is essentially good.

⁷³Philipson and Grossmann, op. cit., p. 216; cf. also p. 36.

⁷⁴Ibid., p. 173.

⁷⁵Wise, Judaism: Its Doctrines and Duties (Cincinnati: Leo Wise, no date), p. 26.

⁷⁶American Israelite, XXIX (New Series; July 21, 1882), 21.

Let man alone, and he is good; let him free [sic], and he is virtuous; give him truth, and he is pious; give him light, and he is wise.⁷⁷

His goodness is a natural correlative of his creation, for "God is good Himself."⁷⁸ Indeed, the Creator seems to have endowed man with a "religious impulse," which "prompts man to search after God, to think His ideas, and to imitate His perfections; 'to walk after Jehovah your God,' as Moses expresses it."⁷⁹ Because this impulse is universal, even "atheists and skeptics" must admit that it is "innate."⁸⁰

This "religious impulse" is seemingly identical with the "innate ideas," which we have mentioned in another context. These innate ideas must be cultivated, however, just as the "imago" itself must be developed, if the ideas are to become anything more than merely "innate."⁸¹

Hence, while man is "good" by definition, he cannot remain "good" if he does not seek to fulfill the end for which he was created. Thus Wise provides the theological basis for, and gives divine sanction to, his ethics.

Yet, while presenting man as essentially good, Wise does not ignore the fact of sin. His definition of sin follows the orthodox (both Jewish and Christian) division into sins of "omission" and those of "commission," or, as Wise puts it: "There are two kinds of sins. 1. Not to do our duty, and 2. to do what the divine laws prohibit."⁸² While more will be said in the following section concerning the nature of sin, it must be noticed here that Wise also distinguishes between individual and collective sin.⁸³

⁷⁷Israelite, XIII (Sept. 21, 1866), 4; cf. also XVI (May 20, 1870), 8.

⁷⁸Ibid., IV (Aug. 14, 1857), 44.

⁷⁹Philipson and Grossmann, op. cit., p. 215; cf. also Israelite, VIII (Dec. 27, 1861), 204.

⁸⁰Ibid., XVII (Oct. 28, 1870), 8.

⁸¹Ibid.; cf. XIII (Nov. 2, 1866), 4.

⁸²Ibid., VII (July 6, 1860), 4.

⁸³Cf. Wise, "Funeral Address," in Emanuel Hertz, ed., Abraham Lincoln: The Tribute of the Synagogue (New York: Bloch Publishing Co., 1927), pp. 92-99.

Once the question of man's goodness versus his sinfulness has been raised, the way is prepared for a discussion of the problems of freedom, determinism, and the nature of evil.

Freedom, Determinism, and Evil

The question of man's freedom, or lack of it, and the related problem of evil and sin are, for Wise, probably the most disputed, and the most important, theological matters with which he deals. At least, it is to these questions that he devotes the bulk of his "theological writings." This is not at all strange, if Wise's theology is given the proper historical perspective. For, on the one hand, he had to combat the Christian arguments in this area, and, on the other hand, and perhaps even more important, the solution of these questions was essential to the construction of the "Universal Judaism" to which Wise devoted the greatest part of his life.

The freedom of man was, for Wise, the necessary prerequisite of moral integrity.

Liberty and morality are the conditions of each other. Man can only then be truly moral, if he is truly free, and only then he is actually free, if he is thoroughly moral in his character.⁸⁴

Wise "proves" this statement in his usual manner of showing that criminal law has universally assumed that the defendant was and acted as a free moral agent.⁸⁵ He also adduces a biblical proof text for his assumption. This he does by showing that the statement in Exodus 34:7 about "visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children and the children's children to the third and the fourth generation" actually should read "only to the third and fourth generation."⁸⁶

Not only is freedom the presupposition of morality, but it is also the basis of the doctrine of rewards and punishments.⁸⁷

Wise was somewhat taxed theologically when it came to the question of the existence or nonexistence of a "devil." In line with

⁸⁴Israelite, II (July 13, 1855), 6.

⁸⁵Wise, Judaism and Christianity, p. 54.

⁸⁶Israelite, V (Jan. 28, 1859), 236.

⁸⁷Philipson and Grossmann, op. cit., p. 228.

what has been said above, he states, "If the devil tempt him, the devil is the criminal."⁸⁸ And, waxing more eloquent:

It is a useless endeavor to find out [discover] a devil in the Old Testament where absolute malignity has no place, and all ghost stories are put down as crimes against the Almighty. We have nothing to do with the Christian devil nor with his infernal residence. Rude, inflexible and unreasoning heathens must have a hell and a devil; we need none. "I and my house shall worship Jehovah."⁸⁹

Yet he comes dangerously close to the traditional Christian concept of the devil in stating:

It is a metaphysical truth, that "the highest necessity is the highest freedom" -- and it was morally necessary for man to sin, in order that he may become conscious of his power to overcome his inclination to evil, by the better principles implanted in his heart.⁹⁰

And he states that Adam and Eve did not sin "of their own free will; it was the persuasion of the serpent beguiling Eve which led Adam to transgression."⁹¹

Thus, though wishing to combat the Christian devil, which is really an anthropomorphic way of accounting for sin while retaining man's moral freedom, Wise is, in the last analysis, forced to adopt a quite similar solution.

While allowing a great deal of room for human freedom, Wise can in no way be accused of veering toward either moral latitudinarianism or metaphysical deism. For the providence of God is proposed as an adequate check to both deviations. The moral aspect will be considered later; let us here simply note Wise's comments on the providence of God in the course of world history.

Providence is "absolute" in history.

⁸⁸Ibid., p. 217.

⁸⁹American Israelite, XXX (New Series VIII; Feb. 8, 1878), 4.

⁹⁰Israelite, IV (April 30, 1858), 340.

⁹¹Philipson and Grossmann, op. cit., p. 229.

... no phenomenon in the history of humanity, no nation and no fragment of one appears or disappears on the stage of life, no fact influencing the destiny of mankind transpires, that is not necessary to realize the divine plan of universal government. Whatever there is and influences more or less directly or indirectly the destiny of humanity, is because it is necessary according to the wisdom, justice and grace of providence.⁹²

Indeed, historical progress will be realized, even if "the vast majority is conservative and opposed to every progressive step,"⁹³ and this, according to Wise, was the actual case in Czarist Russia.⁹⁴

Yet, while the historical course of humanity is predestined, "to man... moral freedom is given, to work in the plan of God and be successful and happy, or to oppose it and be disappointed and wretched."⁹⁵

Every individual is appointed to fulfill that destiny in society for which he is gifted with adequate capacities. This destiny must be fulfilled, although this or that particular individual may revolt, and neglect his appointment to the bitter end of self destruction. Others gifted with the same capacities will take that place in society and fulfill that same destiny. This is individual freedom and universal necessity.⁹⁶

Thus, providence must eventually triumph; all that individuals can do is to retard it somewhat.⁹⁷

On the other hand, man may assist in furthering that which providence has ordained.

⁹²Israelite, IV (Dec. 4, 1857), 172; cf. also Wise, The Cosmic God, p. 140.

⁹³Cf. Wise, The Cosmic God, p. 147.

⁹⁴Cf. Israelite, I (Oct. 27, 1854), 124.

⁹⁵Ibid., X (Sept. 11, 1863), 84.

⁹⁶Wise, A Lecture Delivered January 7, 1869, Before the Theological and Religious Library Association of Cincinnati (Cincinnati [?]: no publisher, 1869 [?]), p. 2.

⁹⁷Cf. Israelite, XVIII (Aug. 18, 1871), 8.

With every onward step in knowledge and morality, man gains dominion over the lower realms of nature, the conscious subjugates the unconscious, and so he assists the Deity in the government of matter, the triumph of self conscious and moral intelligence.⁹⁸

Man assists providence, then, by advancing knowledge. It is at this point that Wise's rational side is most easily noticed--for the problems of freedom, determinism, and especially of evil are closely bound up with the progress of the intellect. Education, for Wise, is no longer simply a traditional Jewish virtue; it is the panacea for the problem of evil.

It is... self evident that the recognition of the moral law runs parallel with the progress of intellectuality.⁹⁹

This is not to say that the uneducated child is immoral (this would come too close to the Christian concept of "original sin"); Wise says that he is simply "unconscious of morality," and "it [the child] becomes consciously moral in the same progressive manner as it becomes intelligent."¹⁰⁰

As a correlative:

It is a matter of common sense that morality depends upon rationality. The ancient rabbis well maintained, "the ignorant rustic cannot be pious," simply because he does not know how.¹⁰¹

The wicked are thus dispatched with the comment that they "suffer of defective intellect by nature or training; they are fools."¹⁰²

Evidently all men (including the wicked) want to do good, but often "... his bewildered intellect misguided him to resort to the

⁹⁸Wise, The Cosmic God, p. 178.

⁹⁹Philipson and Grossmann, op. cit., p. 253.

¹⁰⁰Ibid.; cf. p. 230; cf. also American Israelite, XXIV (New Series III; April 16, 1875), 4; and Israelite, VIII (Feb. 21, 1862), 268.

¹⁰¹Philipson and Grossmann, op. cit., p. 254.

¹⁰²American Israelite, XXXIV (New Series; July 15, 1887), 4.

wrong means."¹⁰³

Is, then, ignorance (and consequently wickedness) an automatic "ticket to damnation"? Such would seem to be the case, with the possible exception of the thorny problem presented in the case of lunacy (which, by the way, is currently under renewed theological scrutiny with the impact of psychiatry upon the field).

Man's intellectual powers are limited as well as his senses are; still, every man is gifted by his Creator with as much intellect as to enable him to acquire the knowledge of God and His perfections, so far as to become pious, happy and useful in the imitation of these perfections. The idiot and lunatic are rare exceptions to the rule.¹⁰⁴

This standpoint is not at all strange, if we realize that Wise was not measuring ignorance (or wickedness) by any absolute standard (such as the traditional Jewish ethic), but by the minimal standard offered in the "innate ideas" (see above). Ignorance is damnable, but only ignorance of those things which are "common knowledge" to all men. Consequently, actions are "wicked" only if they are the outgrowth of a conscious opposition to that ethic which would be universal (because it is based on the "innate ideas").

Whatever conscience dictates is the dictum of conscience, is moral for that person.... Before God the savage may be as righteous as the conscientious philosopher and the heathen as well as the prophet in Israel; for each of them, obedient to conscience's dicta to the best of his knowledge, has the great consolation and justification; the same God who is our judge is also our law giver.¹⁰⁵

Two additional arguments of Wise must be given here to make the picture complete. First of all he has to support philosophically the supposition that real knowledge may be had, or his whole system falls to the ground. This he does in the first chapter of The Cosmic God, and, while his arguments lie outside the scope of this paper, the reader would do well to peruse them.

¹⁰³Israelite, VII (Sept. 28, 1860), 100.

¹⁰⁴Ibid., IV (Aug. 14, 1857), 44.

¹⁰⁵American Israelite, XXIII (New Series I; Sept. 18, 1874), 4.

The second argument is actually the conclusion of his whole structure of epistemology, namely, that as knowledge increases in the world, evil will decrease (for evil is basically ignorance).

Evil is a negative, it is accidental only and temporary. It came into the world by the ignorance of man, and comes always by the same agency. Ignorance is the original sin and the source of evil.... In the same ratio as knowledge increases evil decreases.¹⁰⁶

Since he bases morality upon intelligence, Wise must of course deal with the problem of intelligent men who are apparently wicked. He admits that this does sometimes in fact occur; however, these cases, like lunacy, are "exceptions" and do not have to be explained.¹⁰⁷ He is more interested in the principle:

I do not mean to maintain that those who possess the most extensive learning are necessarily the most moral men, although as a general thing they are; I only maintain that self-consciousness is the cause, and morals the effect, and the effect can never be higher than its cause.¹⁰⁸

Why, then, considering the eons of educational effort, is man still not moral?¹⁰⁹ He toys with the idea that a person's "temperament" can greatly influence his life (and, we would presume, also his moral and educational abilities):

Temperament has much to do with the religious views of people. The choleric is usually orthodox, the sanguinic a free thinker, the melancholic an enthusiast, and the phlegmatic an indifferentist. This does not say that so it must be, and so man must remain all his lifetime. His will, influenced by reason and conviction, is much stronger than his temperament. But

¹⁰⁶Ibid., XL (New Series; May 3, 1894), 4; cf. also Israelite, XIII (Aug. 31, 1866), 5.

¹⁰⁷Philipson and Grossmann, op. cit., p. 254.

¹⁰⁸American Israelite, XXIV (New Series II; April 16, 1875), 4.

¹⁰⁹Could Wise have answered this question satisfactorily, he would have waged a most effective war against the Christian concept of original sin, with which he was at so great odds.

where reason is not at work, or but feebly exercised, the above classification will be found correct.¹¹⁰

He considers, but rejects, the possibility that immorality (or other traits) could be congenital.

Man is no more the result of his parents than the candle light is the result of the gas flame at which it was lit, or vice versa. He inherits dispositions, and no more than that; and all his dispositions are subject to reason and conscience.¹¹¹

Thus he arrives at the somewhat feeble conclusion that man lacks the "moral courage" or the "self-denial"¹¹² to do what is right (the question of why this is so being exactly the problem under consideration). His solution is that man must realize the need of just this type of moral courage (he does not say how he is to do this), and he seems to assume that the very realization of the need will produce the desired change.

If every man could realize how much good he might do to suffering humanity by his words, deeds, and examples, how many doubts he could dispel, how many woes assuage... if every one would know and feel that he is an apostle of truth, an angel of consolation appointed by the Deity to bring heaven's best blessings to the world, how beautiful a world ours might be!¹¹³

Repentance

Because man does sin, he must be punished (since God is just).

Virtue and reward, sin and punishment are cause and effect irrevocably combined. Punishment is only the end of sin, its natural and inevitable consequence.¹¹⁴

¹¹⁰Israelite, XX (Feb. 28, 1873), 4.

¹¹¹Wise, Judaism and Christianity, p. 104.

¹¹²Cf. Israelite, XVIII (Sept. 29, 1871), 8.

¹¹³Ibid., X (Jan. 1, 1864), 212.

¹¹⁴Ibid., XII (Sept. 29, 1865), 100.

But man can atone for his sin and escape the logical punishment (which is then no longer necessary).

... if man, having become conscious of his guilt, inflicts upon himself the penalty of remorse and repentance, the divine end is reached, and God in His infinite mercy does not punish him.¹¹⁵

There must, however, be accompanying restitution to the injured party.

Atonement is made before God for our sins, by sincere repentance of our wickedness, and humiliation before God, by making good with our neighbor in whatever we sinned against him, and coming to the firm determination to sin no more.¹¹⁶

There is (contrary to Christian theology) no necessity of any outside aid in atonement.

We believe that no intercession is necessary between God and man, between the Father and His sons. Man is his own agent, gifted with free volition and intellect, directly connected with his Maker. It is in his power to separate himself from the Divine nature, by acts of impurity and sinfulness; it must also be in his power to return by his own acts to the Divine nature without any one's aid.¹¹⁷

What role does prayer play in repentance? Wise seems to have held at least two attitudes toward the efficacy of prayer. In the first:

We consider prayer only has an effect on the praying subject, but can do no good to others, except rousing in them a train of thoughts which have an affinity to those expressed in the prayer. Metaphysically spoken, prayer is a religious lesson.¹¹⁸

¹¹⁵Ibid., II (March 7, 1856), 284; cf. also VII (July 6, 1860), 4.

¹¹⁶Wise, Judaism: Its Doctrines and Duties, p. 74.

¹¹⁷Israelite, II (Sept. 21, 1855), 84; cf. also IV (Aug. 14, 1857), 44; and IV (June 25, 1858), 404.

¹¹⁸Ibid., IV (April 9, 1858), 316.

Hence, prayer for others will not help them (in atonement or in anything else) except as a reminder that they must repent and correct their own actions.

Yet, in other places, he allows room for an actual "power" of prayer, whereby God may hear the prayer and actually act upon it. He does this to maintain the freedom of God in all situations, for God is "not subject to iron laws... He may grant his [man's] petitions..."¹¹⁹

Wise sums up the method of repentance in the following steps: 1) the conviction of guilt; 2) penitence; 3) the resolve to amend one's life; and 4) the repairing of any damage done to others.¹²⁰

Before closing this brief sketch of Wise's thoughts concerning repentance, we ought to note that he pictures "hell" in terms of one's being unable to repent and shows thereby how deeply concerned he actually was over this problem. "Hell" is:

... to be alone with his remorse, self-contempt,
and repentance... not to be permitted to enter the
presence of the Almighty and Most perfect....¹²¹

Human Destiny

Man strives after a twofold destiny, according to Wise. His goal in this life is moral perfection, and he hopes for immortality hereafter.

Following as a logical conclusion from his ideas concerning education and morality, perfection is something which may be achieved through human effort.

We believe man is the image of God, ... with the will and power to attain human perfection, to become holy, god-like, and work out his own salvation by the proper exercise of the faculties and attributes which God bestowed on him.¹²²

¹¹⁹American Israelite, XXXV (New Series; Sept. 14, 1888), 4; cf. also XXXVIII (New Series; May 5, 1892), 4.

¹²⁰Israelite, VII (July 6, 1860), 4.

¹²¹Ibid., I (Jan. 12, 1855), 212.

¹²²Ibid., V (May 13, 1859), 356; cf. also Wise, The Essence of Judaism, p. 7.

This moral perfection is described as: "to love God with all the heart, soul, and might...."¹²³ But of what does it consist?

Prosperity, happiness and salvation make the sum total of man's object of existence, his summum bonum, his duty to himself and to the race....¹²⁴

Any theology which takes happiness as man's earthly destiny must have problems when it confronts the question of theodicy. If the righteous should be happy, why is this not the case? Is God not just? Wise is, at this point, as traditionally orthodox as Job's "friends."

The righteous are happy, however humble and poor they may appear to us, for theirs is the peace of the soul; and the wicked are unhappy, however prosperous they may seem, for "There is no peace for the wicked, saith my God."¹²⁵

Wise takes here the same stand that he took in relation to the question of education and morality: those cases which he cannot explain are written off as mere "exceptions,"¹²⁶ and the "principle" of his position is stressed, the principle in this case being that God's justice can at least be discerned in history.

...it is unsafe to judge of God's Providence and justice by the fate of one man or by one category of instances, although the justice of Providence is visible in every man's life. It is safest to learn the justice of Providence from the history of mankind....¹²⁷

Immortality

Wise, maintaining his dualism of "soul" and "body" in considering the nature of man, thought quite naturally in terms of the "immortality" of the soul, instead of the "resurrection of the body." This doctrine

¹²³Israelite, IV (Oct. 2, 1857), 100.

¹²⁴American Israelite, XXXI (New Series; Dec. 19, 1884), 4; cf. also XXVIII (New Series; Dec. 2, 1881), 181.

¹²⁵Wise, The Essence of Judaism, p. 22.

¹²⁶Cf. Israelite, XIII (Oct. 5, 1866), 4.

¹²⁷Wise, The Essence of Judaism, p. 23.

was formulated, at least in its embryonic stages, quite early in Wise's ministry,¹²⁸ and with this assertion he illustrates one of his most radical cleavages with Orthodox Judaism and with Christianity.

Reason has demonstrated that the doctrine of immortality has reference, and is applicable to, the soul alone. Man lives, forever, not in body, nor even in body and spirit combined [an obvious jab at Pauline theology], but only in spirit.¹²⁹

The soul is a "substance," distinct from the body,¹³⁰ and it is this substance which achieves true happiness in the future life,¹³¹ as, presumably (see above), the body partakes of that happiness which is experienced in the present.

The soul achieves immortality by fulfilling its "destiny in society" and by the "triumph and mastery of the conscious over the unconscious, of mind over matter."¹³² Here again it is seen how radically Wise's dualism was pursued.

It is well, however, to notice that he never considers the possibility (which had been the standard Christian argument against this doctrine for centuries) that this rigid dualism almost completely negates any basis for ethical action in this world. His "gnostic" conception of the soul should lead him to ask, "Of what use is the body?" but he never entertains this question.

One further ramification of his "gnostic" position should be noted. Man looks forward to a heavenly immortality of the soul, but also to a "kingdom of heaven" which will come upon earth "through the conscious practice of moral laws."¹³³ One wonders just how these two concepts can be held at one and the same time.

¹²⁸For an account of the now famous "Charleston debate," cf. Knox, op. cit., pp. 63 ff.

¹²⁹Israelite, XV (Sept. 4, 1868), 4.

¹³⁰American Israelite, XXV (New Series III; Dec. 10, 1875), 4.

¹³¹Cf. Wise, Judaism: Its Doctrines and Duties, p. 30.

¹³²Cf. Wise, The Cosmic God, p. 178.

¹³³Cf. Philipson and Grossmann, op. cit., p. 217.

SECTION III: JUDAISM

Principal Doctrines

Wise attempted to list, in several places in his writings, what he considered to be the chief doctrines of Judaism. It is noteworthy that these various lists seldom enumerate the same things. This is understandable, however, when we consider that these lists are abstracted from sermons, articles, and addresses, none of which had the avowed purpose of presenting a systematic "creed of Judaism." They were all enumerations of doctrines which at the time and for one reason or another he believed it necessary to prove. Indeed, as has been suggested in the introduction, the existence of a "creed" was, in its very nature, abhorrent to Wise. Nevertheless, we give a composite of these lists for the sake of completeness and because they shed a broad light on the type of "doctrines" within which Wise's total theology moved. (Any points of repetition within the several lists will be omitted.)

1. The existence of God as taught in the Bible.
2. The dignity of man as the image of God.
3. The duty of man to imitate the perfection of God.
4. The rewards and punishments dispensed by God both here and hereafter.
5. The duty of Israel to promulgate that truth which will some day unite all men.¹³⁴
6. The immortality of the soul.
7. The eternal justice of God.¹³⁵

¹³⁴Numbers 1-5 were taken from Israelite, III (Aug. 7, 1856), 46.

¹³⁵Numbers 6-7 were taken from Israelite, II (April 25, 1856), 340.

8. The denial of a "personal Messiah."
9. The denial of bodily resurrection.
10. The denial of a return to Palestine.
11. The denial of a restoration of the sacrificial cult.
12. The denial of "duplicate holidays."
13. The denial of "cabalistic notions."¹³⁶
14. The denial of incarnation.
15. The denial of original sin.
16. The denial of the devil.
17. The denial of universal depravity.
18. The belief in man's moral freedom.
19. The belief in the ability of a man to save himself.¹³⁷
20. The belief in God as "first cause."
21. The willingness to obey God's law as found in Scripture.
22. The belief that all men will eventually be united in truth and justice.¹³⁸
23. The belief in the unity of God.
24. The belief in the Sinaitic revelation.
25. The belief in the providence of God.

¹³⁶Numbers 8-13 were taken from Philipson and Grossmann, op. cit., p. 63.

¹³⁷Numbers 14-19 were taken from Philipson and Grossmann, op. cit., pp. 400-1.

¹³⁸Numbers 20-22 were taken from Israelite, VI (May 18, 1860), 364.

26. The belief in God's covenant with Abraham.
27. The hope of Israel in the "final triumph."
28. The observance of the Sabbath and holidays as prescribed in the Bible.¹³⁹

The Basis of Judaism

Wise held firmly to the belief that Judaism, in all its manifestations (some of which were aberrant), was able to trace its roots to the "covenant between God and man, God and Israel, as recorded and preserved in the Torah [Torah], written by Moses in the Book of the Covenant."¹⁴⁰ This covenant was "expounded and reduced to practice by Moses, the prophets, sages, and lawfully constituted bodies in Israel."¹⁴¹ In this exposition, however, at different times different aspects of the three chief contributors to the faith--the Bible, the Talmud, and reason--were seized upon and elevated to the position of supreme importance. By Wise's time Orthodoxy had given to the Talmud the position of primacy. He felt that this was wrong in principle, for neither reason nor the Talmud could ever replace the biblical record as the main source of Jewish religion (the heart of the biblical record being, for Wise, the Decalogue).

... the covenant of God with Israel depends on the Decalogue, and no other document, commandment, revelation, doctrine or precept. If the covenant depends on the Decalogue, then Judaism does.¹⁴²

Thus the central authority for Judaism must always be the Sinaitic revelation.¹⁴³ Any further developments in Judaism must be squarely based on this revelation.

¹³⁹Numbers 23-28 were taken from Israelite, IV (Oct. 30, 1857), 132.

¹⁴⁰American Israelite, XXXIV (New Series; Sept. 9, 1887), 4.

¹⁴¹Ibid.

¹⁴²Philipson and Grossmann, op. cit., pp. 136-37.

¹⁴³Ibid.; cf. p. 206; cf. also Israelite, XIX (Aug. 16, 1872),

Laws grow out of customs, and customs must be based on the Torah; hence laws and customs not rooted in the Torah have no authority.¹⁴⁴

Only in this light can Wise's position regarding the Talmud be properly evaluated. There has been a great deal of ink spilled to the effect that Wise completely abrogated the validity of the Talmud for Judaism. This was the hue and cry which the Orthodoxy of his day raised, and even today too much stress has been laid upon Wise's disbelief in the Talmud. As an example, witness the following statement:

[Wise was] perfectly willing to accept the Talmud as "the only legally binding interpretation of the Bible" at a rabbinical conference in Cleveland in 1855. It is hardly possible that he really believed this, even at that time.¹⁴⁵

Notice that Wise states, shortly after the conference in question:

... knowledge of the Talmud is required to judge and discriminate, which reform is legal, Jewish and admissible, and which is contrary; therefore no reform without the Talmud.¹⁴⁶

The present writer does not feel that Wise made any radical "about-face" in his views on the Talmud at any time during his ministry. This writer feels that Wise actually meant something quite different in the statement at the conference (cf. note 145) from what his critics thought he meant. Wise never said that the Talmud was to be superseded. (Indeed, a great part of The Israelite was devoted to talmudic sayings and quotations.) What was to be superseded in the Talmud

¹⁴⁴Yearbook of the Central Conference of American Rabbis (Cincinnati: Bloch Publishing and Printing Co., 1893), III, 5.

¹⁴⁵Glazer, op. cit., p. 37. The statement to which Wise gave his approval at that conference was:

The Bible as delivered to us by our fathers and as now in our possession is of immediate divine origin and the standard of our religion. The Talmud contains the traditional, legal, and logical exposition of the Biblical laws which must be expounded and practiced according to the commandments of the Talmud.

Cf. Knox, op. cit., p. 98.

¹⁴⁶Israelite, II (Nov. 23, 1855), 164.

were those passages which he felt to be "contrary to the spirit of the Torah."¹⁴⁷ For the absolute "Word of God" was, is, and always will be in the Bible.¹⁴⁸

The Talmud ... by deep and arduous researches and investigations, has to be dissected in its different elements, so that the divine may be distinguished from the human portions, and while the former will remain intact, the latter part, as of human origin, is fit for a further development, can be changed and adapted to the wants of changing times, and clearly indicates the possibility of progress.¹⁴⁹

Notice that the statement at the Cleveland Conference (again cf. note 145) lays greatest emphasis upon the method of expounding the biblical laws. This writer feels that here Wise found the greatest importance of the Talmud; it was a method of biblical exegesis--and the exact opposite of the modern biblical criticism which was so odious to him. Thus, while individual talmudic interpretations may or may not have been accepted by Wise, the Talmud as a method of interpretation does contain "the traditional, legal, and logical exposition of Biblical laws," and, for this reason, it is to be maintained as the second great basis of Judaism.

Of the third basis of Judaism, little additional need be given at this point (cf. the section on "reason and revelation"--above). Reason is essential to Judaism primarily to keep it from shading into dogmatism.

Judaism is not a matter of uninquied faith, which is to be accepted on the word of the priest; it is the religion of reason, which must be known and understood.¹⁵⁰

¹⁴⁷Philipson and Grossmann, op. cit., p. 396.

¹⁴⁸Cf. Israelite, XIII (Aug. 31, 1866), 5.

¹⁴⁹Ibid., II (Dec. 7, 1855), 180; cf. also Knox, op. cit., p. 127.

¹⁵⁰Israelite, XV (March 26, 1869), 4; cf. also XII (Dec. 8, 1865), 180.

Dogma was so strongly resisted by Wise because he felt that it was essentially "sectional" and would be a detriment to the establishment of his "universal Judaism."¹⁵¹

In at least two places, however, Wise advocates what might be called a "short-term dogmatic."

The question with us is, whether Judaism is not too tolerant for its self-protection in this age of shallow-mindedness and frivolity, when any fresh youth utters allegations without any reflection as to causes and consequences and coins them Judaism. We rather think... Judaism should be less tolerant just now, until this atheistical or agnostical storm has blown over.¹⁵²

His second concession to dogma was in wishing to establish a "synod" to give authority to "central doctrines," which would serve as "fundamental principles to students, teachers, preachers, writers, etc...."¹⁵³

The Task of Judaism

Because of the historical uniqueness of the revelation at Sinai, Israel, since it has kept this revelation alive, is the sole depository of truth.

Truth is the hope of mankind. Salvation is in truth only. Religious truth is from Israel only, and there is none beside.¹⁵⁴

Just why Israel was elected, Wise could not say,¹⁵⁵ but he was convinced that

Had the Hebrews not been disturbed in their progress a thousand and more years ago, they would have

¹⁵¹Ibid.; cf. VI (Nov. 4, 1859), 140. For further statements, cf. also XIX (July 26, 1872), 8; XII (Jan. 26, 1866), 236; and XI (Jan. 27, 1865), 244.

¹⁵²American Israelite, XXXI (New Series; Dec. 12, 1884), 4.

¹⁵³Ibid.; cf. XXX (New Series; May 10, 1878), 4.

¹⁵⁴Israelite, XIV (Sept. 6, 1867), 4.

¹⁵⁵Ibid.; cf. XVIII (Sept. 1, 1871), 8.

solved all the great problems of civilization which are being solved now under all the difficulties imposed by the spirit of the Middle Ages. ¹⁵⁶

The mission of Israel is thus to bring to completion the object of the covenant: the "redemption of mankind." ¹⁵⁷

... God has selected the people of Israel from among all nations to be the bearers of divine truth, and to diffuse the bright light of religion among mankind. Wherefore we may justly say, our cause is the cause of mankind.... ¹⁵⁸

To this end Wise speaks of the realization of a "universal Judaism." ¹⁵⁹ The chief feature of this religion is its unity; it will be achieved on "the great day when one shepard [sic] and one flock will unite the human family in truth, justice and love." ¹⁶⁰

To arrive at the universal Judaism, both the progress of civilization without, ¹⁶¹ and the reform of Judaism within, ¹⁶² will contribute their share of development. Civilization is progressing through the development of the arts and sciences, and will progress (under the providence of God) until it is ready to accept the message of universal Judaism. ¹⁶³

¹⁵⁶Wise, History of the Hebrews' Second Commonwealth (Cincinnati: Bloch and Co., 1880), p. 386.

¹⁵⁷Israelite, VI (June 8, 1860), 388.

¹⁵⁸Philipson and Grossmann, op. cit., p. 47.

¹⁵⁹Cf. Israelite, II (Nov. 30, 1855), 172.

¹⁶⁰Cf. Philipson and Grossmann, op. cit., p. 261.

¹⁶¹Cf. Israelite, II (Nov. 23, 1855), 164.

¹⁶²Ibid.

¹⁶³Indeed, many men outside the fold of Judaism have progressed to the point where they actually are ready for this message. They are Jews "without knowing it." Cf. Israelite, XVIII (Aug. 18, 1871), 8.

It is right at this point that Wise's theology comes to bear directly upon his practical ministry; for the establishment of the "universal Judaism" from within has as its first prerequisite the union of all Jewry.

Men of enthusiasm should not fail to work for the extension and perfection of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations, founded by Wise in 1873⁷.
It is the cause of Israel.¹⁶⁴

American Judaism

As might be expected, Wise had little use for Zionism,¹⁶⁵ for he felt that this movement was just as antithetic to the cause of universal Judaism as was sectarian dogma.

That Israel, which worships no celestial or terrestrial body, no prophet and no saint, can not worship a country, a temple or an institution; the glory of our God fills the universe and is manifested in every soul.¹⁶⁶

If the world becomes "one Holy Land" and "one Chosen People," there is no need for a return to Palestine.¹⁶⁷

What the Jews of the world need, according to Wise, is to be settled among free people, where they can freely devote themselves to Judaism, and not to be "again excluded in a corner of Syria."¹⁶⁸ Thus Wise can say of Zionism: "That new Messianic movement over the ocean does not concern us at all."¹⁶⁹

At one point he does say that Zionism is "at least worthy of careful consideration," but only for the persecuted Jews of "Russia,

¹⁶⁴American Israelite, XXXIII (New Series XI; Oct. 10, 1879), 4.

¹⁶⁵Cf. Knox, op. cit., pp. 112, 114.

¹⁶⁶Israelite, XVII (Aug. 26, 1870), 8.

¹⁶⁷American Israelite, XXXIII (New Series XI; Aug. 8, 1879), 4; cf. also Israelite, XIII (Aug. 31, 1866), 5.

¹⁶⁸American Israelite, XXIX (New Series; July 14, 1882), 12.

¹⁶⁹Yearbook of the Central Conference of American Rabbis (Cincinnati: May & Kreidler, 1898), VII, xi.

Roumania and the other hells of eastern Europe."¹⁷⁰ But for the American Jew?

Lay aside all these considerations and ask the question if Palestine should be purchased, who is to go there? The American Jew is an American to all intents and purposes.¹⁷¹

Wise saw European Jewry as being too "servile"; the American Jew "must become an American, in order to gain the proud self-consciousness of the free-born man."¹⁷²

Indeed, the only distinction between the American Jew and the American Gentile is "in religion only."¹⁷³

Wise could feel this way because he saw the American state as being the embodiment, in modern times, of the "Mosaic State."

The identity of fundamental principles and main form of government being evident, we need not go any further to justify our thesis that the government of the United States in principle and form is identical with the Mosaic State as laid down in the Pentateuch. The Jew in this country has found a home after his hapless sojourn among strangers for eighteen centuries.¹⁷⁴

Indeed, of George Washington, Wise states:

... whenever political oppression is totally removed, as in the United States, the Messiah has come, and

¹⁷⁰Cf. American Israelite, XLIV (New Series; Aug. 5, 1897), 4.

¹⁷¹Ibid., XXXII (New Series X; Jan. 24, 1879), 4.

¹⁷²Wise, Reminiscences, translated by David Philipson (1st edition; Cincinnati: Leo Wise and Co., 1901), p. 331.

¹⁷³Israelite, V (Jan. 28, 1859), 236; cf. also American Israelite, XXIX (New Series; March 9, 1883), 300; and Max B. May, Isaac Mayer Wise (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1916), p. 239.

¹⁷⁴American Israelite, XLV (New Series; Dec. 29, 1898), 4; cf. also George Zepin, Isaac M. Wise (Cincinnati: Hebrew Union College, 1941), p. 10.

so he will come to all nations. Washington was no less a Messiah than Cyrus.¹⁷⁵

For Wise, the Messianic age (particularly in the United States) was just around the corner. He even in one place predicted that it would be here by 1900.¹⁷⁶

Wise's ideas concerning proselytism were quite in line with his concept of the "universal Judaism." He was convinced that, particularly in America, the progress of science, art, and culture would eventually proselytize all people. For this reason Jewry need make no active effort in this area.¹⁷⁷ Judaism "raises no objections to proselytes, altho' it seeks none."¹⁷⁸

Though he would have removed "all obstacles" to their acceptance, Wise felt that this had to be done by a "synod," if it were to achieve acceptance by all the congregations.¹⁷⁹ To this end, he wished to do away with circumcision as a requirement for proselytes.

Whereas, circumcision is no necessary condition for entrance upon Judaism, and the omission of the rite does not exclude any Israelite from the community of Israel, and does not dissolve him of his duties as such, Resolved, that the circumcision of proselytes be not required as an act of initiation.¹⁸⁰

It was, however, in those areas which concerned the congregations themselves that Wise did his most intensive work. While individual reform measures may have little or nothing to do with a systematic theological presentation, they are worthy of note because they are, in a sense, a "barometer" of Wise's thought as a whole.

¹⁷⁵Israelite, VI (July 29, 1859), 28.

¹⁷⁶Cf. Wise, The End of Popes, Nobles, and Kings; or The Progress of Civilization (New York: J. Muhlhaeuser, 1852), p. 20.

¹⁷⁷Cf. American Israelite, XXVII (New Series; Sept. 3, 1880), 76; and Wise, A Defense of Judaism Versus Proselytizing Christianity, p. 6.

¹⁷⁸Israelite, XVI (July 16, 1869), 10.

¹⁷⁹American Israelite, XXX (New Series; Dec. 14, 1883), 4.

¹⁸⁰Philipson and Grossmann, op. cit., p. 73.

Most striking are his statements of the principles of reform which he seeks to follow. These principles would today be considered very conservative, and they lead one to wonder at the storm of protest which they raised in his day.

It is not true that one who calls himself a radical may do what and as he pleases. Judaism is an ancient institution which has laws and customs which must be respected.... The Jew must submit to Jewish law and custom, unless he can show good cause against either.¹⁸¹

Wise's reforms were thus only those which he considered necessary to "reconcile Judaism with the age and its needs,"¹⁸² and, while the "forms" change, the "principles" from which they derive their validity are not subject to change.¹⁸³

Yet, while Wise spent a great deal of time showing how Orthodox his "principles" were, the changes which he derived from these principles were so far-reaching that they struck at the very roots of Orthodoxy. We are at this point faced with the problem of a man who, at least in his actions, could derive very radical changes from very conservative "principles." Were the conservative principles only a "smoke screen" to hide the radical nature of his reforms? Did he really believe that his reforms were conservative? One is inclined to the opinion that Wise erected this "smoke screen" consciously.

Most of the things which he advocated were for the sake of decorum in the service.¹⁸⁴ To such reforms would belong the elimination of the sale of mitzvot, the use of a choir and organ, and more rigid Sabbath observance.

The second biggest class of reforms has to do with the elevation of the status of women. To this group belong the confirmation of girls and the abolition of the women's gallery in the synagogue. Most radically, he toyed here with the idea of having women preachers.¹⁸⁵

¹⁸¹American Israelite, XXVI (New Series LII; March 19, 1880), 4; cf. also Knox, op. cit., p. 32.

¹⁸²Philipson and Grossmann, op. cit., p. 379.

¹⁸³Ibid.; cf. p. 260.

¹⁸⁴Cf. Knox, op. cit., p. 28.

¹⁸⁵Cf. American Israelite, XXXVI (New Series; Nov. 7, 1889), 4; and XXXVII (New Series; Nov. 27, 1890), 4.

Most basic, and similar to the reform for the sake of decorum, are those reforms which are directed to the task of insuring that the service be understood by all concerned. Thus he favored the preaching of all sermons in English and the modernization and translation of the prayer book.

All reform--and this coincides with Wise's general position--"must not be such as to disturb Israel's union."¹⁸⁶ For it must be remembered that union, being the precursor of universal Judaism, was foremost in Wise's mind.

To me, Reform never was an end in itself; I considered it only a necessary means to clarify the teachings of Judaism, and to transfigure, exalt, and spread these teachings.¹⁸⁷

And yet, every reform which Wise accomplished drove the wedge of schism deeper into the Judaism whose unification he so truly desired.

¹⁸⁶Cf. Philipson and Grossmann, op. cit., p. 385.

¹⁸⁷Wise, "The World of My Books," in American Jewish Archives, VI, 126.

SECTION IV: ETHICS

Religion and State

Wise devoted the bulk of his writings in the field of ethics to a discussion of the relationship between religion and the state.

He was convinced that the best government was no government at all. Theoretically at least, man should be responsible directly to God.

Nobody has the right to govern another; but neither has anyone the right to legislate for others. Absolute justice is king, supreme and sovereign.¹⁸⁸

He saw, however, that a state was necessary in practice to insure that no one transgressed another's freedom and also to interpret the laws of justice to fit the needs of the time.

It is the duty of a theocratic government to protect the people, that it be not misgoverned, but that it govern itself, so that true justice reign and nothing impede the free development of human nature. It is the duty of a theocratic legislature to expound the laws of eternal justice and reduce them to general formulas for practical purposes.¹⁸⁹

It follows that the state, in seeking to provide this atmosphere of free development, must first of all insure peace. This is, indeed, its main object.¹⁹⁰

The state, in pursuing its object, must comply with the same ethical standards which apply to the individual,¹⁹¹ for it is, basically, only the individual writ large. Thus the state, like the individual, may

¹⁸⁸Philipson and Grossmann, op. cit., p. 219.

¹⁸⁹Ibid., pp. 19-20; cf. also Israelite, XVI (June 3, 1870), 8.

¹⁹⁰Cf. Israelite, XVIII (Feb. 9, 1872), 8.

¹⁹¹American Israelite, XXXVII (New Series; March 12, 1891),

not engage in war merely for the sake of "conquest, revenge, or extermination," but may fight a war "against crimes committed on the inalienable rights of man by any state...."¹⁹² For the same reason, Wise fought for the abolition both of capital punishment¹⁹³ and of the corporal punishment then current in the armed forces.¹⁹⁴

As was suggested above, he thought the republican form of government the best. In fact, it was "the only one which God ordained for the government of society,"¹⁹⁵ while monarchy was the least desirable form.¹⁹⁶

Though government was to be the protector of absolute justice, it was not to interpret this (essentially religious?) concept in any sectarian fashion. Thus Wise insisted upon the complete separation of religion and the state. He was particularly wary of any religious penetration into the public schools.¹⁹⁷

But what is the duty of the individual citizen? It is threefold: 1) to practice justice in his relations with the state and with his fellow citizens;¹⁹⁸ 2) to submit to the law of the land (unless it be in direct violation of his religion);¹⁹⁹ and 3) to attempt to "force government, whatever its form may be, to become what it ought to be, the administrator of justice."²⁰⁰

¹⁹²Ibid.; cf. XXXI (New Series; Jan. 16, 1885), 4. Wise considered the Spanish-American War such a "holy war." Cf. XLIV (New Series; May 26, 1898), 4.

¹⁹³Israelite, XVII (May 12, 1871), 8.

¹⁹⁴Ibid.; cf. XVIII (Dec. 29, 1871), 8.

¹⁹⁵Ibid., XII (Sept. 22, 1865), 92.

¹⁹⁶Ibid.; cf. II (July 13, 1855), 5.

¹⁹⁷Ibid.; cf. XVI (July 16, 1869), 8; and II (Sept. 28, 1855), 92.

¹⁹⁸Ibid.; cf. VI (May 18, 1860), 364.

¹⁹⁹Ibid.; cf. XXI (Oct. 17, 1873), 4.

²⁰⁰Ibid., IV (March 5, 1858), 276.

Ethical Attitudes

In general, Wise's ethical system might be described as a middle- or upper-middle-class ethic which has its roots both in his biblical studies and in the culture which surrounded him.²⁰¹ Its dominant themes are moderation in all things,²⁰² a healthy skepticism,²⁰³ and rigid self-discipline;²⁰⁴ its motive power is based upon the concept of love:

We believe that the principle of absolute justice must govern mankind in their social compacts, and love must lead the individual in his intercourse with man.²⁰⁵

Wise lays great stress upon the motivation for an act and holds that this is a more important ethical consideration than the act itself.

Any person that acts from impure or selfish motives is no moral man; however useful or beneficial what he does or does not may be to others or himself, he stands in need of moral culture and moral training.²⁰⁶

The one really strong reature of Wise's ethics was his determination of the goal of all ethical behavior.

The preservation of the human race, which includes the duty of self-preservation, is certainly the fundamental moral duty of man, from which all other duties

²⁰¹Wise's most comprehensive ethical treatise is to be found in The Essence of Judaism, Chapter 4.

²⁰²Cf. Wise, An Essay on the Temperance Question (Cincinnati: Bloch Publishing and Printing Co., no date).

²⁰³Cf. American Israelite, XXXII (New Series X; Jan. 31, 1879), 4; and Philipson and Grossmann, op. cit., p. 182.

²⁰⁴Cf. Israelite, XX (March 14, 1873), 4; and American Israelite, XXVI (New Series IV; March 17, 1876), 4.

²⁰⁵Israelite, V (May 13, 1859), 356.

²⁰⁶Philipson and Grossmann, op. cit., p. 237; cf. also Israelite, VIII (Dec. 6, 1861), 180; and VI (May 18, 1860), 364.

spring and with which all others are connected more or less directly.²⁰⁷

This definition allowed his ethic to hold potential appeal for all rational, moral persons, whether or not they advocated his own particular religious philosophy.

Yet, while man's goal is the preservation of the race, he may be called on to suffer, and perhaps to die, for his convictions.

... there is something incomparably great in the conduct of those who suffer rather than lie, who prefer misery to hypocrisy, who can die for the sake of an ideal.²⁰⁸

But Wise was, in principle, against every form of killing, be it murder, suicide,²⁰⁹ or even the hunting of animals for sport.²¹⁰ The following is an interesting commentary upon his times in relation to this ideal:

A man who fights a duel is ripe for the penitentiary, as well as any robber or assassin. The man who kills another with malice and forethought is an assassin, and ripe for the gallows.²¹¹

Indeed, in one place Wise comes close to advocating absolute nonviolence toward all nature.

He [God] commands: that Jew or Gentile shall not kill either a Jew or a Gentile, a fly or a worm, to-day or at any other time.²¹²

²⁰⁷American Israelite, XXXI (New Series; Nov. 28, 1884), 4; cf. also Philipson and Grossmann, op. cit., pp. 245-46.

²⁰⁸Philipson and Grossmann, op. cit., p. 181; cf. also Israelite, XII (Oct. 6, 1865), 108.

²⁰⁹Cf. American Israelite, XXXVIII (New Series; Oct. 29, 1891), 4.

²¹⁰Ibid.; cf. XLII (New Series; Aug. 22, 1895), 4.

²¹¹Ibid., XXXII (New Series; May 2, 1879), 4. This statement seems to contradict the statement above, concerning capital punishment.

²¹²Israelite, XIV (Dec. 20, 1867), 4.

Specific Ethical Injunctions

While it is impossible to catalogue all the various ethical questions which Wise considers, it will be useful to list some of those which may advance our attempt to understand his personality.

Wise strongly believed in religious education. This was a job not only for the Jewish colleges and schools whose cause he championed for so long, but also for the parents.

Religious instruction to the rising generation is the duty of the parents, and must be one of the main objects of our congregations.²¹³

Two specifically sectarian causes to which Wise devoted his pen were the maintenance of Sabbath observance²¹⁴ and the problem of interfaith marriages. Of the latter he states forcibly:

No Jewish minister has the right to sanction the marriage of a Hebrew man or woman to a person outside the Jewish faith, because the congregation of Israel, by law and custom, prohibits such inter-marriages....²¹⁵

Regarding such a stand, Nathan Glazer remarks with some justification:

For a religion that looked forward to the unity of mankind on the basis of prophetic justice, there would seem to be no possible objection to Jews marrying non-Jews....²¹⁶

Perhaps, however, the following statement, typical of the nineteenth century, might shed some light upon Wise's obstinacy on this point:

²¹³Ibid., XVIII (Aug. 25, 1871), 8; cf. also Philipson and Grossmann, op. cit., p. 256.

²¹⁴Cf. American Israelite, XXXIII (New Series XI; July 4, 1879), 4.

²¹⁵Ibid., XXXII (New Series X; March 14, 1879), 4; cf. also XXX (New Series; Dec. 14, 1883), 4.

²¹⁶Glazer, op. cit., p. 54.

All mongrel races in which the blood of either the two or three races is mixed, experience teaches and science has established, degenerate and disappear in the course of time.²¹⁷

Because, as Wise phrases it, "It is moral to work. It is immoral to do nothing, to be a parasite,"²¹⁸ he was more or less puritan in his strictures against gambling, which he considered a "crime,"²¹⁹ and against overindulgence in frivolous pursuits.

Amusement and play, being no useful labor, are proper only as a recreation after working hours; as a steady employment they are vicious.²²⁰

Much has been said concerning Wise's stand, or lack of it, in regard to the slavery question. The present author, having nothing new to add in this area, would refer those interested to the excellent chapter which Bertram W. Korn devotes to the subject.²²¹

Summary

In bringing the discussion of Wise's ethic to its conclusion, let us simply remark that his was an "activist" ethic--an ethic whose foundation lay in man's moral freedom to choose a real good or an equally real evil.

No Hebrew, man or woman, has a right to say, I will do nothing for the cause of Judaism; I let others do it for me. Nobody can be just, pure, virtuous, happy, or miserable for you to your God, to your conscience, and to your fellow men; for you are an independent being and a free moral agent. You are as good, bad, or indifferent as you make yourself.²²²

²¹⁷American Israelite, XXXII (New Series X; March 14, 1879), 4.

²¹⁸Philipson and Grossmann, op. cit., p. 239.

²¹⁹Cf. Israelite, XIX (Dec. 6, 1872), 8.

²²⁰Wise, Judaism: Its Doctrines and Duties, p. 51.

²²¹Cf. Bertram W. Korn, Eventful Years and Experiences (Cincinnati: American Jewish Archives, 1954), pp. 125-50; cf. also Glazer, op. cit., p. 40; and American Israelite, XLIII (New Series; June 24, 1897), 4.

²²²Israelite, XX (March 28, 1873), 4.

SECTION V: THE POLEMIC AGAINST CHRISTIANITY

The Good in All Religious Systems

In general, Wise was quite tolerant of religions other than his own. Indeed, he saw a positive value in some branches of Christianity as being the precursors of the "universal Judaism."

... we find the Unitarians and Universalists, on another way, approaching the same aim, and we rejoice and glorify [sic] in the grand idea, that, however slowly, the time is nevertheless approaching when all mankind is striving to verify the words of the last prophet:
"Have we not all got one father, has not one God created us all? Why should we become faithless one to another, to defile the covenant of our forefathers?"²²³

And, because God is all just, "--every person in every religion doing what is right, and shunning what is wrong, will enter into the everlasting bliss of salvation...."²²⁴

"The Jews Crucified Jesus"

Nevertheless, orthodox Christianity was fair game for Wise. He entered the polemic lists chiefly to confound the ardent (to say the least!) conversionists of the sectarian Christianity of his day. The then current battle cry of such men was that Jews had crucified Jesus and so were open to all sorts of damnation, from which only repentance and rebirth (to Christianity) could save them. Wise attacked them at the source of their argument by writing many articles and one whole book (The Martyrdom of Jesus of Nazareth [Cincinnati: Bloch Publishing and Printing Co., 1888]) to show that it was actually the Romans who had been responsible for the crucifixion.²²⁵

²²³Ibid., II (Oct. 19, 1855), 116; cf. also Wise, Judaism and Christianity, p. 43, where he states that there is some good in all religions "or else man could not have believed in them."

²²⁴Israelite, VIII (April 18, 1862), 332.

²²⁵The reader is referred to the sources given for the specific arguments, since they would, if given here, require space out of all proportion to their value.

The Irrationality of Christianity

Wise's method in this struggle is, as may have been expected, strictly rational. He seeks to prove that Christianity is "at warfare with philosophy and science, and sustained by constant appeals to credulity and ignorance."²²⁶ Of Jesus he comments:

He met with some success among the lower classes, also among foreign harlots, Sodomites, publicans and other Roman agents; but the intelligent portion remained cold to his enthusiasm. The cures which he performed appeared miraculous to the vulgar, impious to the religious, and ridiculous to the intelligent. While they were aggrandized by the believers, they proved repulsive to the sober and reflecting minds.²²⁷

One other comment must be recorded, if only for its wit:

It takes a mind less used to logical and mathematical (perhaps "biological" would be better) thought than ours to believe that a woman was impregnated by a ghost, holy or profane....²²⁸

Comments on Individual Christian Doctrines

The basic flaw in Christianity, according to Wise, was that it had given up the position of pure monotheism.²²⁹ But just as important to Wise was the rather low estimate of human nature which he found there.

²²⁶Wise, The Origin of Christianity and a Commentary to the Acts of the Apostles (Cincinnati: Bloch and Co., 1868), p. 535.

²²⁷Wise, History of the Hebrews' Second Commonwealth, p. 260.

²²⁸American Israelite, XXVIII (New Series VI; June 8, 1877), 4. For other comments on the irrationality of Christianity, cf. Israelite, II (March 7, 1856), 284; XXII (June 26, 1874), 5; and American Israelite, XXX (New Series VIII; March 22, 1878), 4. Cf. also Sandmel, op. cit., pp. 355-56, where he shows that Wise at first doubted the very historicity of Jesus, but later changed his mind.

²²⁹Cf. Israelite, VII (Sept. 28, 1860), 100; III (Feb. 13, 1857), 252; and American Israelite, XXVIII (New Series; Nov. 25, 1881), 172.

The greatest sin Christian theology committed on humanity was that done by the theory of the monk Augustine, viz.: that man deliberates under the horrid influence of an original sin, from which the power of faith only, unconditional and uninquied faith in the teachings of the priests, can redeem him. This was a death-blow to moral freedom and the supremacy of intellect.²³⁰

Wise considered the basic error of Christianity to be its first hypothesis-- the incarnation.

A man who seriously maintains that the Eternal God and the man Jesus are identical is as near lunacy as was Caligula when he proclaimed himself the highest god. The idea is so absurd, so inexpressibly stupid and blasphemous, that one must lose his reason first before he can think it.²³¹

Equally reprehensible was the doctrine of vicarious atonement.

To believe in vicarious atonement is a denial of God's mercy, irrational and contrary to the teachings of Moses and the prophets.²³²

Paul

Oddly enough, Wise considered Paul to be one of the greatest religious figures of all time.

All Jews of all ages hoped and expected that the kingdom of heaven would encompass all nations and tongues; but Paul undertook to realize this hope; this is his title to greatness.²³³

²³⁰Israelite, VIII (Feb. 21, 1862), 268; cf. also VII (Sept. 28, 1860), 100.

²³¹American Israelite, XXX (New Series VIII; May 24, 1878), 4; cf. also Israelite, II (Oct. 19, 1855), 116; III (Feb. 13, 1857), 252; and V (April 29, 1859), 342.

²³²American Israelite, XLIII (New Series; Sept. 10, 1896), 4; cf. also Israelite, XI (Oct. 7, 1864), 116.

²³³Philipson and Grossmann, op. cit., p. 352.

Paul, however, made three fatal errors: 1) the belief in "supernatural agencies" (such as demons); 2) the basing of salvation upon faith instead of upon reason or works; and 3) the abrogation of the law of Moses.²³⁴ Of the last error he states:

... the undermining of chastity and morality was not the worst consequence of that error: worse than that was the overthrow of the standard of right without the ability of replacing it by another.²³⁵

Christianity and Its Relation to Judaism

The only real values in Christianity, according to Wise, were those elements which had been borrowed wholesale from Judaism. Of the New Testament he states:

Whatever parts... are true and good are not original; they are taken from the Old, and those parts which are original are neither good nor true.²³⁶

The same is true of Christian doctrines; the good are "taken from the sacred shrine of Judaism."²³⁷

Christianity was not totally bad, however, for

The ethics of Israel's religion were too clear and too dazzling for the heathen to accept, hence Christianity served as a stepping stone from which they could gradually step up to the full light of Israel's religion....²³⁸

²³⁴Cf. American Israelite, XXX (New Series VIII; May 24, 1878), 4.

²³⁵Ibid. (May 3, 1878), 4.

²³⁶Israelite, IX (July 4, 1862), 5.

²³⁷Ibid.; cf. IV (Nov. 27, 1857), 164; cf. also VI (July 15, 1859), 12.

²³⁸American Israelite, XXVII (New Series; Nov. 5, 1880), 148.

Yet, in his day Wise believed that Christianity had outlived its course and was now chiefly a hindrance to progress. He states:

If you do it [i. e., allow other religions a place in heaven] not for the sake of the Father, do it for the sake of the Son, that he appear not so much smaller than the rabbi who formulated the Jewish doctrine, "Pious Gentiles partake of life and bliss eternal." And if you refuse to let us poor creatures go to Heaven, please let us live in peace on earth.²³⁹

²³⁹Wise, Judaism and Christianity, p. 66.

SECTION VI: AREAS OF TENSION IN WISE'S THEOLOGY

Of the many problems which might be considered as these pages approach their conclusion, let us examine only three of the more obvious "tensions" present in Wise's theological system.

One such tension arises in the very method which Wise employed. He attempted to couch his theological writings in the philosophical jargon of his day, a method which he evidently thought necessary if his ideas were to win acceptance. He does not, however, while using a "philosophical" style, ever delve deeply enough into his material to achieve a carefully worked out philosophical presentation of the whole of his thought. There is no great magnum opus to provide the backbone which such a system necessarily requires.

The reasons for this deficiency may be seen in two areas. In the first place, we must consider the audience for which he wrote. The bulk of his theological-philosophical material was delivered at its first presentation either before his own, or some other, congregation, as a regular sermon, or before one of the many "literary societies" or "theological," "philosophical," or "library" associations of his day. If it is true today that such societies are composed mostly of laymen with at best only a rudimentary knowledge of the subject in question, we cannot doubt that those of Wise's day were no better off.

A more important reason lies in the probability that Wise himself was not exactly "at home" in these fields. His method of learning a new science--evolution, for example--was to sequester himself for a summer and read whatever books he could get his hands on dealing with the subject. While this in itself tended to make him a widely read individual, one rarely gets the impression that he had ever delved very deeply into any of these subjects.

The most glaring theological tension in Wise's works concerns the relation of man to providence and the relevancy of man's efforts in his search for truth and in his application of this truth. This problem is seen most clearly in the areas of individual freedom as over against divine providence, human reason versus divine revelation, and the dualism of soul and body in relation to the meaningfulness of ethical action. One feels that, in all these questions, Wise wishes both "to have his cake and eat it too." While all these problems have been mentioned in this essay, it must be said here that, taken together, they can be regarded as a negation of much that constitutes his theological position. For when one attempts to apply these various affirmations to the particular individual

with a particular problem, the result is a plurality of conclusions, all of which can be argued with equal vigor on the basis of one man's writings.

To take an example: let us posit hypothetically the relatively simple theological problem of murder. Reason may have demanded the crime, while revelation definitely prohibits it. Man was free to commit the act, but it somehow fits into God's total providential scheme. And morally--if morals are measured by the data of revelation--it was wrong, for it negates the doctrine of the "preservation of the race"; yet the body is of relatively little importance when juxtaposed with the soul.

Admittedly, the individual case could be solved by selecting one or more of these opposites and applying them to the problem. However--and here is precisely his theological weakness--Wise has not provided the hierarchical arrangement of his sources out of which the various points of view might be reconciled. He seems, in general, unwilling to say, "We are selecting this in conscious opposition to that." All theologies have such tension, for on every point at least two things can be said. But both things cannot be maintained without at least the tacit admission that they do stand in conflict. Wise at no point ever admits this conflict.

The third great tension in Wise's writings is one seemingly inherent within Judaism: that of universalism and particularism. Wise, as has been seen, is definitely a universalist--consider his belief in a "universal Judaism." Nonetheless, he retains elements with which it is difficult to combine this attitude. The question of intermarriage has already been mentioned; let us consider here two other aspects of the problem.

The first of these is that of assimilation. It would seem that, if the coming age were really just around the corner, Wise would not have worried so much over this problem. This is particularly true, if one considers that the great day in question was to be effected exclusively by the providence of God. Here again, however, Wise wishes to assert two things without considering their theological relationship. And perhaps this fear of assimilation is one of those elements which he took over unquestioningly from traditional Judaism.

His universalism is endangered also by his "racist" ideas. Wise never seems to have been able to think of the Hebrews along other than racial lines. Indeed, as has been seen, he was convinced of their racial superiority. Yet when he came to a description of American Judaism, he could argue that the Jews differed from their Protestant neighbors "in religion only."

In the final analysis, however, to Wise must fall the honor of being one of the first liberal Jewish theologians in this country. His theology, like all theology, has been superseded, for better or worse. He was one of the few to attempt for his faith a theological apologetic--which, in a predominantly Christian society, may be the only apologetic worthy of the name. It is the present writer's hope that this brief survey may, in some small way, stimulate further efforts both in the study of Isaac M. Wise's thought and in the broader field of Jewish theology.

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